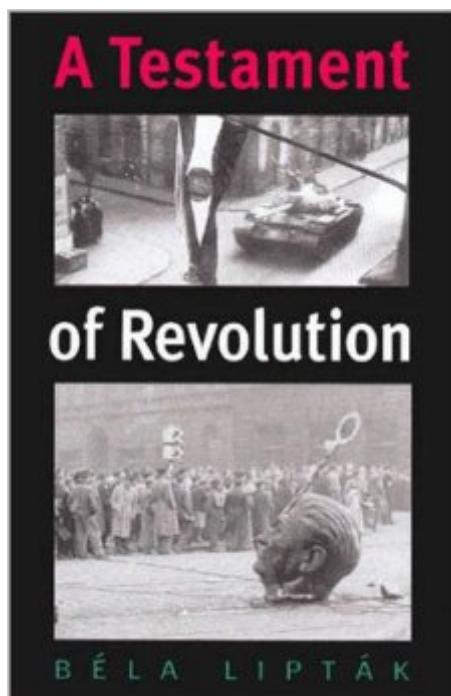


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A Testament Of Revolution (Eastern European Studies)



Synopsis

This study peels away decades of intervening history to provide a firsthand look at the brief, doomed struggle of Hungarian freedom fighters against Russian oppressors. Written in 1956 in an Austrian refugee camp, the memoir details the events of the conflict and the author's own experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bela Liptak has given us a tremendously valuable account as an eyewitness to, and leading participant in, the Hungarian revolution of 1956. Written in a frequently humorous, conversational style, you can't help but feel as if his younger self, a twenty-year-old student nicknamed "Ocsi", is one of your own good friends. Through Ocsi's eyes, Liptak drives home the reality surrounding historical characters who endure an incredible roller-coaster of emotions, from exhilarating joy to bitter, ultimate sacrifice of lives and hopes in the few short weeks of chaotic revolution against the Soviet occupation. *Testament to Revolution* is a fast, gripping read, easily accessible and rewarding to everyone, not just students of Eastern European history and politics. As a political scientist, I was especially gratified to see an account of not just the view of political events from the ground, but also how difficult it was to coordinate mushrooming centers of heroic resistance by all social classes, especially by young students. As a human being, it will be hard for anyone not to be ashamed of the indifference of the West to the tragedy played out throughout Hungary, but especially in Budapest (even after admitting that bipolar confrontation in a nuclear age would have made direct intervention in a Warsaw Pact member exceedingly risky business). If you go to the

Buda side of the city today, you can still see bullet and shell marks pocking the walls of buildings around the castle, and get some idea of what Liptak and his fellow revolutionaries faced. My major criticism concerns the strident and often indefensible nationalist statements interspersed not only in the short introductory "history lesson" but occasionally throughout the text.

Liptak's memoir compares favorably with Sandor Kopacsi's "In the Name of the Working Class." SK explains his role as the Budapest deputy chief of police who switched sides and aided the rebels; BL offers the view from a student leader's encounters on the pavement below the offices where SK and his counterparts worked to advance the aims of 1956. While SK insists that the revolt was for a purer, worker-dominated type of communism (perhaps akin to an anarcho-syndicalist model) free of Soviet imperialism, this argument dims in BL's account. He gives the points that the students and workers distributed and proclaimed, but the whole question of how the Hungarians' new state would contrast with both the capitalist and the communist systems appears rather muddled in his narrative. Maybe such nuanced planning could not be taken in the heat of the moment, as the Hungarians struggled in a few days to drive out the Soviets. Where it excels is in simply telling it like it was: the hunger, the generosity, the giddy sleeplessness, the state of his corduroy jacket, the grease-slicked rifle he hoists. You become so caught up in his vivid descriptions that you wonder why so little about this revolution has reached the West in easily accessible form. His footnotes add valuable details about the fate of his fellow revolutionaries and the mental framework of a "typical" young man hearing the demands of the leaders for the first time at the university conveys itself here unforgettably.

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